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Nurses' union agrees to 4-year pact

The contract, a union spokesman says, would make Rhode Island Hospital employees "among the highest paid in the state."

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PROVIDENCE — The union representing nurses and other health-care employees at Rhode Island Hospital has reached a tentative agreement on a new four-year contract, a year before the current contract is scheduled to expire.

Local 5098 of the United Nurses and Allied Professionals said the agreement, reached Monday and disclosed by the union yesterday, would make the Rhode Island Hospital employees "among the highest paid in the state."

"We have protected a lot of our benefits over the next four years," union president Linda McDonald said in an interview. "We are hoping this will improve recruitment and retention."

If union members approve the deal July 17, starting nurses would see their \$21.67-per-hour salary immediately rise to \$23.69, McDonald said.

In four years, that wage would reach \$26.52 per hour, or \$55,162 annually, for nurses working 35 hours per week. (Many nurses and

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other staff work at least 40 hours per week and have opportunities for significant overtime pay.)

Registered nurses with 10 years of experience would be paid \$81,078 a year in the last year of the new contract.

If approved, the new salary increases would come just six months after union employees

received a 4.5-percent raise under the current contract.

"This new contract will provide important economic security to our members during what is likely to be a time of economic insecurity in health care over the next four years," McDonald said in a statement yesterday.

The union represents 2,200 employees at Rhode Island Hospital, about one-third of its total work force.

Rhode Island Hospital is the only hospital operated by the non-profit Lifespan company that has unionized employees, according to hospital spokeswoman Gail Carvelli. Lifespan also runs Miriam Hospital and Hasbro Children's Hospital.

Over all, the tentative pay increases range from 16.5 percent to 33 percent over four years, according to a union summary of the agreement.

By the end of the contract, the

top pay rate for respiratory therapists would be \$39.14 per hour, and radiologic technologists would earn \$45.14 per hour.

"We are grateful to be able to provide the nurses and allied professionals at Rhode Island Hospital with a competitive wage and benefits package," Carvelli said yesterday. "We are extremely pleased."

The two sides reached the agreement after nine bargaining sessions.

Union members will vote on the deal after

LINDA MCDONALD

Union president

meeting to discuss the contract at the Crowne Plaza hotel in Warwick, McDonald said.

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